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Worker Centers: Organizing Communities at the Edge of the Dream, by Janice FINE, Ithaca, N.Y.: ILR Press, 2006, 316 pp., ISBN 13-978-0-8014-4423-4.

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the exclusion of race relations. Yet, any one of these complications would have been a challenge for DeVault, given the number of strikes and the limited

information available for many of the strikes she investigates.

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Worker Centers: Organizing Communities at the Edge of the Dream,

by Janice FINE, Ithaca, N.Y.: ILR Press, 2006, 316 pp., ISBN 13-978-0-8014-4423-4.

This important book fills three gaps in contemporary labour studies. First, author Janice Fine places American worker centres in their historical context. Next, she draws a map of immigrant worker centres across the US at the beginning of the 21st century, managing to provide breadth as well as depth of critical analysis. Finally, she uses in-depth studies of workers' centres to expose the contemporary mis-fit between the structure and practice of unions and the marginal, precarious, immigrant and often invisible working class of the US' informalizing economy. But the picture she draws is neither hopeless nor leftier-than-thou. The abundant campaign and case study material includes stories of creative worker centre-union partnerships whose successes offer pointers for the future.

Workers' centres are community based mediating institutions that provide support to and organize among communities of low-wage workers. The study begins by locating workers' centres in terms of the historic void they filled. The waves of immigrants who came to the US at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, "the golden era of immigration," were served by a rich range of immigrant service institutions. Many of these have disappeared or wizened, including trade unions, fraternal organizations, political parties representing ethnic constituencies and settlement houses. Contemporary immigrant workers' centres have arisen, she argues, to fill the gap left by the decline of the traditional web of immigrant service institutions. But while the

need for labour market organizations for immigrant workers remains pressing, the contours of employment have changed in fundamental, structural ways. Does Fine address this question? Yes. Her study of workers centres is both a portrait of a new form of worker organization in itself, and a window into the ways in which traditional unionism must change if it is to speak to and for the new American working class. Although she does not use this concept, Fine is, in reality, documenting the rise of a "network society" of workers' rights organizations in the face of the shrinking effectiveness of labour market regulation by legally recognized institutional actors. What is the shape of capital and industry the new network faces? *Worker Centres* does not treat the question in depth.

In 2005, there were 137 workers' centres in the US, of which 122 are defined as immigrant workers centres. The study focuses on 40 of these, with in-depth research on nine. Three waves of development for the centres as a whole are identified. The first wave, in the late 1970s, was led by African-American activists, Chinese immigrants in California and New York City, and Chicanos along the Mexican border. Arising out of the crisis of deindustrialization which hit the US manufacturing sector in the late 1970s and early 1980s, these centres were often critical of the narrowness of vision and lack of energy of organized and established trade unions.

The second wave spans the late 1980s to the mid-1990s, and focuses on

Central American, South American and Southeast Asian immigrants. While they drew on the first wave for organizational models, the diversity of the community organizations they relied upon as well as their openness to religious organizations seem to have broadened their alliances, while blurring their class identity. The third wave begins in 2000, with Filipino, African, South Asian and Korean immigrants. This last wave seems to be closer to the unions, but also to faith-based organizations.

So the three periods of worker centre establishment each drew on different immigrant and racial groups, took shape in response to whichever lurching crisis was occurring in the US economy at their moment, chose their principal allies differently. One *fil-conducteur* that runs through all three periods is the growth in importance of religious organizations as allies and sometimes as founders of workers' centres. Another is the great flexibility with which workers' centres work with their constituents. But a third constant is the diversity of worker centre experiences with trade unions, and the difficulties that both have in establishing partnerships that work for the longer term.

Fine finishes the book by assessing the strengths and weaknesses of "the worker center phenomenon." As strengths, she lists leadership development, changing the terms of public debate, making the enforcement of labour law more effective, taking the lead in improving conditions in traditionally low-wage industries,

democratic inclusiveness. Weaknesses? The small number of workers involved, the small size of most centres, the lack of long-term planning and sophisticated research, the difficulties in sustaining small organizations. But the weaknesses and strengths are linked: if workers' centres became larger, better funded and more organizationally efficient, could they retain their capacity to nurture new leadership, respond quickly and flexibly, with openness and inclusivity? The answer is still open.

As much as it tells us, *Workers' Centres* also raises further questions. As the US has deregulated its labour market over the past 25 years, trade unions have declined quantitatively and qualitatively. Still at the centre of most thinking about workers' rights, unions are nevertheless now only a part of a growing network of workers' organizations, many of which are differentiated from traditional unions by their fusing of functions, flexibility of organizational practices, willingness to work on equal terms with others, and search for untried ways to re-establish workers' rights. Hybridity, horizontal collaboration, openness and a willingness not to be limited by the traditional legal definitions of who is a worker, this network society of workers' organizations poses both challenge and promise to the labour movement. Fine shows us that on the local level at least, an encouraging number of unions are rising to the challenge.

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De la conciliation emploi-famille à une politique des temps sociaux,
publié sous la direction de Diane-Gabrielle TREMBLAY, Québec : Presses de
l'Université du Québec, 2005, 291 p., ISBN 2-7605-1385-8.

Le livre coordonné par Diane-Gabrielle Tremblay porte sur un thème d'actualité, intéressant autant les politiques publiques, les entreprises et les salariés. En effet, la compatibilité entre les temps professionnels, les temps familiaux et personnels s'avèrent d'être

une préoccupation majeure de la vie quotidienne dans les pays industrialisés, terrain privilégié des recherches présentées dans cet ouvrage. Quels sont les chemins que les auteurs ont parcouru pour aborder le problème de la conciliation emploi-famille ?